



Speech By  
**Stephen Bennett**


**MEMBER FOR BURNETT**

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Record of Proceedings, 26 March 2015

**MOTION OF CONDOLENCE**

**Hon. JI Cunningham**

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (9.57 am): I also wish to place on record our deep regret at the death on 7 February this year of the Hon. Junita Irene Cunningham MP, former member for Bundaberg and former mayor of Bundaberg, and our appreciation of her long and highly distinguished service to the state. We extend our profound sympathy to her family in their bereavement.

Nita Cunningham, as she was known, was born in Bundaberg on 12 February 1939. Prior to being elected to the Bundaberg city council Nita served in a number of roles including executive member of the Urban Local Government Association of Queensland; chairman of the Bundaberg and District Local Government Association; chairman of the Bundaberg and Burnett Counter Disaster Committee; and founding managing director of Bundaberg Income Tax Consultants. In her many years in public office, Nita became only the second woman ever elected to the city council, the first woman deputy mayor and the first woman mayor. She became the first woman to represent Bundaberg in any parliament and in 47 years was the first member for Bundaberg to be elevated to the Queensland cabinet. Nita served Bundaberg as alderman and deputy mayor from 1988 to 1991 when she was elected as mayor, a position she held until 1998. As mayor of Bundaberg Nita was party to many momentous occasions, including the royal tour of the Duchess of Kent, the visit of Prince Charles, the opening of the Tallon Bridge, the new library and the sugar museum. She oversaw the Bundaberg CBD redevelopment and gave our city a totally new image and our residents a renewed sense of civic pride. Nita made an official visit to China with a deputation of businessmen to cement our sister city arrangement that continues today with Nanning City, turned the sod for Bundaberg's first university building and opened the long awaited Paradise Dam project.

Nita served her community and the state as the member for Bundaberg from 13 June 1998 until her retirement on 14 August 2006, winning the seat of Bundaberg at three consecutive elections. In her maiden speech to this House on 4 August 1998 Nita spoke proudly of Bundaberg's success in establishing the Central Queensland University campus. Of course, 72 per cent of the students enrolled at Bundaberg were the first members of their families to ever have that opportunity in our city.

Nita spoke of two major problems facing Bundaberg at the time: unemployment and the need for a major water storage. While we continue to face high unemployment in Bundaberg and Burnett, especially amongst our young people, Nita saw clearly the benefits of a reliable water supply. The growers and industry still respect that today. She worked hard to secure funding, and on 7 December 2005 proudly opened the dam, describing the dam opening as one of the proudest moments in her political career.

As the then president of the Bundaberg Sunrise Rotary Club, in 2006 it was my personal privilege to present Nita with one of our highest distinctions—the Paul Harris Fellowship—in recognition of her community service to the people of Bundaberg. Those who knew Nita would remember the handwritten thankyou cards, the beautiful words and the penmanship she presented.

In her letter of thanks to the people of Bundaberg on 7 August 2006, as she moved into retirement, Nita described some of the things she had done—things like going up in a hot air balloon and a light plane, abseiling, riding a penny-farthing bike, going to sea on a tall ship, going to China as an official guest, visiting every capital city in Australia and 80 Queensland cities and towns from Thursday Island to Birdsville and opening countless projects, from sewage plants to the giant gumboot at Tully.

She listed some of her achievements during her 18 years in office with Bundaberg City Council: Bundaberg's second traffic bridge, the purchase of Baldwin Swamp, the beautification of the CBD, a waste management program and new recycling centre, the annual Light Up the Region Christmas lights pageant and the annual mayor's fundraising ball, which continues in her legacy.

Nita took enormous pride in the achievements of her first three terms in state parliament, including twice being appointed as a cabinet minister for local government and planning. She was responsible for the tough new laws for the keeping of restricted dogs and new swimming pool fencing legislation that saved many young lives. She mentioned her appreciation of the honour and distinction of being part of the cabinet and the friendship she enjoyed with her fellow ministers and so many councillors across Queensland.

As a result of being appointed twice to cabinet, and with the blessing of the Governor, she retained the title 'the Hon. Nita Cunningham' for the remainder of her life. In her last term in parliament Nita sought and gained the opportunity to concentrate solely on her electorate of Bundaberg—its people, its problems and its future.

Just a few of the achievements from Nita's time in parliament are the construction of two new weirs and the raising of numerous others, the daily tilt train service from Bundaberg to Brisbane, the new TAFE hospitality building, a new marine centre at the port, and the \$42 million massive ring-road project.

Nita was predeceased by her beloved husband, Elvin, and leaves behind son Glenn, daughter Anne and their families.